

Dear Committee,

It is with great concern that I submit my testimony to this committee as both a parent and an elementary educator in Connecticut's public schools. The common core standards have been introduced into my 4th grade classroom the past two years and it has been made clear to me that the standards do not take into consideration child development, the current resources in our classrooms or the fact that children in elementary school require an environment that fosters creativity, imagination and social skills as well as high academic standards. I fear these decisions are being made by people who do not work with children on a daily basis in a classroom setting, and this will ultimately bring great harm to our children.

My experience in the classroom shows me that children in elementary school become readers when they fall in love with characters in novels. Elementary students need to spend large amounts of time reading books that appeal to them. I believe that reading comprehension is improved through discussion as well as written response; however, there must be a large chunk of time devoted to reading self selected books at an appropriate level in order for a child to thrive as a reader. With the common core standards, I am forced to spend a huge amount of my instructional time teaching non-fiction as well as teaching children to answer written comprehension questions in a very specific way. The heavy non-fiction push is a fast way to turn off many new readers, as well as a missed opportunity for children to lose out on the many valuable lessons learned about life when reading novels and writing fiction. Non-fiction has a place in every elementary classroom, but to implement standards that insist that the focus of each child's elementary reading instruction be solely non-fiction is a huge mistake.

I also have great concerns with the level of difficulty of the elementary math standards on the SBAC test. When comparing practice problems on the SBAC test with the Common Core standards, there is a huge disconnect between the two. The math portion of the SBAC test consists entirely of multi-step word problems, a skill that will take elementary students years to master. In my experience, multi-step word problems while important to teach, are extremely difficult for even the strongest math students. Over the past 8 years I have taught a curriculum that gives students an entire month to master a mathematical algorithm with accuracy and speed. In most cases this is possible with daily rigorous instruction. For students not to be tested on the algorithm alone as was done in our previous curriculum, but rather on several algorithms at once in one problem that the child must pick out and apply is very daunting. For us to accomplish this we will need more math instruction, more math materials and complete support from parents. While this is a lofty goal, it is not something that is currently a reality in the schools. Yet, my students are being tested on it starting this year, and I am being evaluated on it, both of which are of great concern to me.

More than anything else, it is the technology piece of the SBAC test that disturbs me. My greatest concern is that the SBAC test is given on a computer, requiring proficient keyboarding skills. The idea of my sons having to sit at a computer learning to type proficiently by third grade is horrifying to me. Early elementary education is a time of creative and social development -- creating a requirement for my young sons to sit in front of a screen so they can pass a test makes me sick to my stomach when I think about it. This requirement, more than anything else about the SBAC testing, makes me sure that the people making the decisions do

not have a background in child development. The best minds of our times are not experts at math and reading alone; they also have a wide variety of skills including the ability to think outside the box, highly developed social skills and creativity all of which are first honed through personal development created through social interaction and play in the younger grades-- all of which are being sacrificed to improve SBAC scores. My kindergarten age son spends no time in play in his full day classroom. I am most disturbed by this as he came to kindergarten as a reader and with highly developed math skills. I greatly wanted him to have an opportunity to grow socially, but there is nothing but instruction and work time during his school day. Even with full day Kindergarten, our principal felt the second recess should be cut from their day to increase instruction time. Though my son is above where he needs to be academically, my 5 year old still must spend his day practicing facts, in fear of falling behind, as we have created an environment where success is entirely measured by academic growth. I feel this is a great mistake as that this tunnel vision approach to child development is wrong. We must take child development into consideration when deciding what skills are appropriate for children to learn.

Before common core was implemented, typing instruction was done in middle school or high school, a time that was developmentally appropriate. As a teacher I am conflicted, as my best writers will fail the test if their typing is not strong. We have no technology special, let alone a typing special, so this falls to me to teach. To teach typing to my students requires me to sacrifice academic time, which I do not have as the curriculum requires me to stretch every moment I am given. To have typing assigned as homework further creates a divide between the different economic backgrounds the children in my class have. Children from low income families have no computer or lack the organization at home to find the resources needed to find a computer, and have very little chance to learn to type at home. With no typing skills, they have no chance to do well on the test, something that greatly saddens me.

There is great political rhetoric around the issue of education in our country, and the media often paints a picture as our teachers as lazy and our schools as failing. I see a very different picture when I go to work. I look to our success as a country as proof that our schools have been effective. We are a country that is home to the entrepreneurs and inventors and CEO's that rule the planet -- most of whom were educated by United States public school teachers. If our schools are truly to be evaluated and the problems solved we must look at the true issue and question why there is such a huge difference in achievement between different economic and social classes. We must ask what can be done to fight the injustices and suffering that poverty creates in the children who attend these public schools and why they are failing in such huge numbers. Creating a curriculum that is inappropriate is not only unfair to our students, it is creating more of a divide and diverting our attention from the real problem.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,

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